



God chooses Abram

MEETING AIM

To explore how Abram trusted God and how we can trust him too.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Genesis 11:27-12:9; 13:14-18

BACKGROUND

This Bronze Age narrative can seem so distant from our lives in the 21st century, but it is remarkable how many people see their own life journey with God in the story of Abram and Sarai. Help people to understand how Abram trusted God, even when heading into the unknown.

SIGNING IN

5 MINS

As people join your service, welcome them and ask them about their week.

WELCOME

5 MINS

OPTION ONE: Discussion

You will need: the questions below

Put people into breakout rooms (as your software allows) and put these questions into the chat section so they can discuss their answers. Alternatively, invite them to discuss these in their households (or connect with others through WhatsApp or similar).

- Tell everyone about a long journey you have been on.
- What do you prefer to use: a map, a sat nav or your own sense of direction? Why?
- Describe a big change that happened in your life (for example, a new job, moving schools or moving house).
- Have you ever started to do something without knowing how it would turn out? What was it like?

Bring everyone back together and invite people to share what they chatted about.

OPTION TWO: Testimony

You will need: a volunteer who has stepped out into the unknown for God

Before the session, find someone in your congregation who has followed God's call and gone somewhere or done something for him that was uncertain at the start. At the start of your service, ask them questions about their experiences. What was it like to step out into the unknown? What gave them the confidence to do it? If the congregation have any questions, encourage them to ask those too. Don't worry if any seem a bit left-field, let your volunteer answer them anyway!

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: coats, bags and suitcases; several large cardboard boxes (half in one room of your house, half in another)

For this story, you'll need to log onto your online service using a phone or tablet rather than a laptop, as you're going to walk around. Put on a coat, pick up a bag and say that you're going to go on a long journey. Ask people in your household to do the same and join you. Set off around your house, telling this story as you go:

Thousands of years ago, there lived a man called Abram. He had a wife called Sarai. One day, Abram's father, Terah, announced that they were all going to move house, from the city of Ur to the land of Canaan. This was a long way, and it would take a long time. They packed everything they had and set off. They followed the great River Euphrates and eventually got to the city of Harran. This was only about halfway to Canaan, but Terah decided that he would settle there.

Invite everyone to put their bags down, and ask a member or two of your household to take their coats off and sit down.

But God spoke to Abram. He said: "Go from your father's home and go the place I will show you. You're going to be the father of a great nation!"

Abram was very old, and he didn't have

any children, but he trusted God anyway. He left his father's house and set out into the desert towards Canaan. *Go with those who are still wearing their coats to one of the rooms where you placed the boxes.*

Abram, Sarai, their nephew Lot and the rest of the household travelled on. It was a long, hard journey, but finally they came to Canaan, to a place called Shechem. There God appeared to Abram and said: "To your offspring I will give this land." Abram was so happy that God had met with him that he built an altar to God. *Ask your household to build a monument out of half of the boxes.*

Abram, Sarai and their household carried on to the hills to the east of a place called Bethel. He built another altar there and called on the name of the Lord. *Move to the other room with boxes and ask people to build another monument with them.*

Finally, they came to the great trees of Mamre at Hebron. God appeared to Abram once more: "All of this land is yours!" Abram set up his tent and settled down. *Encourage your volunteers to take off their coats and sit down.*

SMALL GROUPS

10 MINS

If your software allows, send everyone off into different breakout rooms made up of a few households. Put these questions into each group's chat box:

- What's your favourite part of the story?
- What do you think of Abram after hearing this story?
- What does this story tell you about God? And about you?
- What does this story mean to you?

Give the groups time to chat about these questions, referring to the Bible passage in they need to.

If you can't put people into breakout rooms, ask individual households to discuss them, and link up those who live on their own using another messaging or video calling app.

**REVIEW**

5 MINS

Get some feedback from 'Small groups', encouraging everyone to take part who wants to.

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

10 MINS

Invite people to do one of these activities in response:

OPTION ONE: Labyrinth

You will need: a simple labyrinth (either emailed to the congregation beforehand or shared onscreen – there are many examples online)

Show the group your labyrinth and encourage them to follow it with their finger. Point out that the idea is not to find your way through as quickly as possible, but to use the journey as a way to chat and listen to God. Invite people to stop along the way and ask God to be with them in various aspects of their lives.

OPTION TWO: Creative prayer

You will need: small boxes (empty matchboxes are ideal)

Remind everyone of the altars Abram built along his journey. Comment that many people at that time believed that a god could only be a god in their own land – however, God proves that he is God everywhere! Ask people to think about parts of their lives where they need to trust God. After a few moments, invite everyone to build up a monument to God using the boxes that they have. Finish this time off with a prayer thanking God for being with us all the time, even in the unknown.

OPTION THREE: Discussion

Ask two people to lead an informal discussion about today's story and what impact it might have on people's lives.

CLOSING

5 MINS

Bring everyone back together and ask if anyone would like to share anything from the response time. Thank everyone for taking part and say an appropriate blessing to close the service.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.



Temi and the terrible timing

Jayesh walked into the lounge to find his friend Kyle still sitting on the sofa playing FIFA.

"Come on!" he said. "My mate said I had to meet him at Boadicea Park as soon as I could. I can't do that if you're sitting in my house, eating my biscuits."

"OK! Calm down, I'm getting there," Kyle replied, levering himself off the sofa and turning the Xbox off. "And they're your mum's biscuits, not yours."

"You're disgusting," said Jayesh, as he swept crumbs off the sofa and into the bin.

"Who is this mate, anyway, and why do you have to go?"

"It's someone I know from Scouts. He's promised me Strictly tickets."

"You and Scouts," laughed Kyle. "Do you know how to get to this place? Have you got your navigation badge?"

"Shut it!" Jayesh pushed Kyle out of the door, but not before Kyle had managed to swipe the packet of Jammie Dodgers from the coffee table.

"So, where is he, this mate of yours?" Kyle sat on a bench, popping biscuits into his mouth. He looked around the park – it was almost deserted.

"He said he'd be here. I don't understand." Jayesh scrolled back through WhatsApp to see if he'd missed a message.

"Always kept his promises before, has he?" asked Kyle. "And anyway, will there be an audience at Strictly this year? You know, COVID? I reckon this friend of yours is having you on."

Jayesh's phone chimed.

"That your mate, is it?" asked Kyle.

"Yep," said Jayesh. "He says I have to meet him at the shopping centre, outside that dusty antiques shop by the bus stop."

"But that's on the other side of town! Who is this idiot? Why is he making you travel all over Manchesterford for something that doesn't exist?"

"Give it a rest. Come on."

"No way. I'm not traipsing all that way just so your mate can tell you to meet him somewhere else."

"Alright. You stay here, then, see if I care. Overdose on Party Rings and get so fat you can't get up off that bench." Jayesh stormed off towards the bus stop.

"Some people are so touchy," muttered Kyle. "And anyway, these are Jammie Dodgers."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

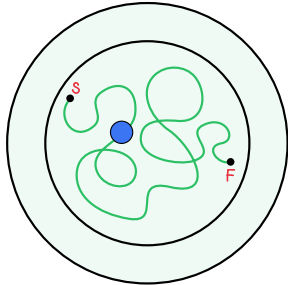
Chat about the story, what the family members liked and didn't like. You could use some of these questions in your discussion:

- How would you describe Jayesh?
- How would you describe Jayesh's Scout friend?
- Was Jayesh right to travel all that way? Why? Why not?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation?

This story is based on Genesis 11:26-12:9; 13:14-18. If you'd like to add a more explicit faith element to your discussion, then read this passage together. Think about the similarities and differences between the Bible story and this one. Which characters correlate to which? How different are they? Encourage your family to think about this Bible story in a new way.

Abraham

These craft ideas can help children dig deeper into the story of Abraham and listen to God as he speaks to them.



Together session one: **MAGNET JOURNEY**

You will need: a paper plate; a magnet; a small piece of magnetic metal; a felt-tip pen

God sends Abram to a new country where he will find blessing and will be a blessing. This craft is all about going on a journey!

Take the paper plate and mark a starting place and an ending place somewhere on its surface. Between the two points draw a twisting and turning line. This is your journey.

Place the metallic object at the starting place on the top of the plate and put the magnet underneath, just beneath your object. Use the magnet to move the object along the path you have drawn on top of the plate until it reaches the ending point. Talk about what it is like to go on a journey, especially when you don't know what your destination will be like.



Together session two: **PROMISE BISCUITS**

You will need: plain biscuits (rich tea or digestives are good); icing sugar; water; star-shaped sprinkles; Jelly Babies; flat knife or spoon
Food craft always goes down well and this one is a reminder of God telling Abram that he will have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky.

Mix the icing sugar and a little bit of water together until you have a fairly thick, spreadable icing. Use a knife or a spoon to spread the icing over one of the biscuits. Place a Jelly Baby on the iced biscuit and then sprinkle some stars on as well. As you eat your biscuits, chat about families and how many stars there might be in the sky. What did God mean?

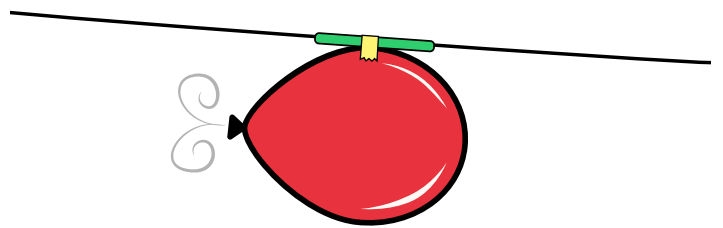


Together session three: **GIFT BOX**

You will need: rectangular or square birthday cards; sticky tape; glue; scissors; pen; ruler; instruction sheet

God promises a baby to Abraham and Sarah. The baby is an extra special gift since Abraham and Sarah think that they are too old to have children. This craft combines the themes of gifts and births to make a birthday card gift box.

Separate the back and front of your birthday card and follow the instructions on the instruction sheet. When you have made your box, use it to give a small gift to someone. As you are making the boxes, use the time to discuss special gifts you have been given and think about what Abraham and Sarah might have been thinking.



Together session four: **BALLOON JOURNEY**

You will need: a balloon; string about 3m long; bulldog clip (or similar); sticky tape; a straw; scissors; marker pens

Abraham trusts that God will show his servant exactly the right woman for Isaac and the servant watches very closely to check who she might be among the people he meets. This craft helps children to explore the idea of trusting that God has a plan and will guide you in the way he wants you to go.

Blow up your balloon, but don't tie a knot in it – just hold it. Let go and watch as the balloon takes a crazy journey before falling to the floor. Now blow the balloon up again and, again, don't tie a knot in it but secure the end with a clip that you will be able to remove easily. Lay the inflated balloon on its side and cut a straw in half. Sticky tape the straw to the balloon (see illustration) and thread the long string through the straw. Secure both ends of the string (you might get someone to hold each end). Take the balloon to one end of the string, take the clip off and let go. Instead of making a crazy journey, the balloon will go straight to the other end of the string. Children might like to decorate their balloons with their names before sending them on their way. Talk about how God might help us to see the way to go and what to do in our lives, just as the straw helps the balloon to get to its destination.



'Back-in-time' games

If you're fed up with Zoom and finished with Teams, why not follow the immortal advice of Kylie Minogue and step back in time? (Nice up-to-date reference for the kids there.) Here are a couple of games that were popular in the days before the internet, but now may have fallen out of use. Why not resurrect them?

PANIC POST

You will need: lots of slips of paper in different colours (one colour per person, A6 is fine); shoeboxes; large bag (such as a bin bag); marker pen

This will take a bit of preparation. Before the game, think of places with similar names, such as Abercrombie, Abergelge, Aberdeen, Arbroath, Aberystwyth, Abergavenny. Write these on the slips of paper, so that you have a full set of names on each colour of paper. (If you have a bit of time, you could make up full addresses for each place: "Ivana Gateau, 32 Pudding Lane, Aberdeen".) Mix up all the 'letters' in your large bag.

Cut a slot in each of the shoeboxes so that they look like postboxes. Write one of your place names on each box and then put them all in different parts of your house (or wherever you're playing this game).

Assign each player a colour of letter. At the signal to go, each player must take a letter of their colour out of the bag and find the right postbox to post it into. They continue to do this until they have posted all their letters. The first to do so is the winner.

Make it more complicated but having different sets of names for each player, or more names (so that each player has a different combination of the places – they may find the postbox for Aberdeen, but not have a letter in their colour to post there).

MUGGINS

You will need: four sets of small cards numbered one to 25 (6cm by 4cm would be fine); A6 piece of card; marker pen

Before the game, make a base card. Split the A6 card into four quarters and write 'More' in two opposite quadrants and 'Less' in the others two.

Shuffle the four sets of 25 together into one pack. Deal out all the cards to the players. Each player puts their cards in a pile face down in front of them. Place the base card in the middle.

The first player turns over their top card. They see if they can put that card on the 'more' or 'less' piles on the base card. They need to start with a one on a 'more' pile and 25 on a 'less' pile. The 'more' piles have to go up sequentially and the 'less' piles go down. If the player can't place their top card anywhere, they should place it face up in front of them.

The next player turns over their top card. If they can put that card on a 'more' or 'less' pile, they should do. If not, they should try to place it on the face-up pile of another player (eg if a player has 16 in their hand, and an opponent has 15 or 17 showing on their face-up pile, the player can put 16 on top). If the player has a choice, they should choose the opponent on their left (or nearest left). If they can't do that, they put the card on their own face-up pile.

Once a player has a face-up pile as well as a face-down one, they should first see if they can play the top card on their face-up pile, before turning over a new one.

During the game, if a player fails to follow the rules, everyone shouts: "Muggins!" and gives that player a card from their own face-down pile. These go at the bottom of their own face-down pile. Not following the rules includes missing the opportunity to put a card on the 'more' or 'less' piles, or on the face-up pile of an opponent; putting a card on the wrong pile; turning over a new card when they could have played the top card on their face-up pile; calling "Muggins!" incorrectly.

Play continues until one player is left with unplayed cards. They are the Muggins.

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The Social Dilemma (12)

Watch the whole film together or concentrate on the clip:
00:15:00 to 00:22:00.

SYNOPSIS

Set in the dark underbelly of Silicon Valley, *The Social Dilemma* fuses investigative documentary with enlightening narrative drama. Expert testimony from tech whistleblowers exposes our disturbing predicament: the services Big Tech provides – search engines, networks, instant information etc – are merely the temptation that lures us to bite. Once we're hooked and coming back for more, the real commodity they sell is their prowess to influence and manipulate us.

The film is a fascinating watch with insightful interviews with industry experts and a real warning of how we currently consume and engage with technology. As current as any documentary can be in our world today, *The Social Dilemma* even includes an extensive section on the growing social media conspiracy theories related to COVID-19. It isn't the most cheerful watch at times, but if you've ever found yourself concerned about how you or your young people engage with technology, it's an essential watch.

DISCUSS

Begin by showing the trailer to the documentary. Ask your young people about their initial impressions about it and what they think the overall message of the documentary might be. To begin the exploration of technology, discuss the following questions as a starter:

- What technology and social media do you engage with the most?
- What online media is 'cool' to use and what would you class as now outdated?
- What does your current screen time report suggest about your phone usage?

This clip takes place towards the beginning of *The Social Dilemma*. This section focuses on how our movement online is tracked and stored so that advertisements and content can be curated towards

us. Dr Shoshana Zuboff speaks about how business works on great predictions, and to make that successful you need a lot of data. Developing this idea, Tristan Harris, a former design ethicist at Google and now cofounder of the Center for Humane Technology, explains how computer models are now so advanced that they can predict what emotions we will feel at particular times, how likely we are to go certain places and how to trigger certain responses in us based on the content they send our way.

After showing the clip, chat about these questions:

- How do you feel watching the clip? Were there any statements that stood out?
- What picture of you do you think is being built up based on your online activity?
- Have you ever been influenced by something you've seen or read online?

DISCUSS

Read Psalm 139:1-24 and discuss the following questions:

- What are some of the themes from this passage?
- The Bible suggests that God knows us deeply, and in some cases may have intimate knowledge of our futures – does this leave us with free will?
- Is the idea of God knowing everything about us comforting or alarming? Do any verses support either of these views?
- Is there a difference in how God views us in this psalm and how the tech companies are described in the clip?

The Social Dilemma is now available on Netflix.

TOM WADE

is head of humanities at Haileybury School.



The sun will come out tomorrow

ARTIST: Marisha Wallace

SUITABLE FOR: under-10s

INTRODUCTION

This *Annie* classic has been rerecorded this year, together with a host of Broadway stars, to raise funds for charities supporting those currently unable to work in the theatre. The lyrics speak of an optimism for the future, much needed in some of the low points of 2020. This session explores the certain hope we have for the future, in Jesus and what he has done for us.

As you begin the session, provide paper and marker pens and invite the children to draw an emoji to show how they may be feeling at this time. Invite them to share more about how they are feeling, as appropriate.

If you are able, provide some simple cloud shapes and invite the children to write, doodle or draw some of the things that may cause them to have a 'cloudy day' – things that perhaps bring them down a little.

Now provide some simple sunshine shapes, and ask them to write, draw or doodle things they are looking forward to in the future, or things which make their days 'sunshiny' even now. Encourage the children to share and celebrate these together.

LISTEN AND DISCUSS

Play the track, distributing copies of the lyrics if needed, or if you prefer use the music video version, hosted on YouTube by *OfficialLondonTheatre.com*.

Invite the children to share what strikes them most about this song; what do these lyrics mean to them? What does it mean to us to look forward to the future?

Distribute Bibles and invite someone to read Titus 2:11-13. (You may want to look at a few different translations beforehand and print out one which is more accessible for this age group). As a group, discuss:

- What does Jesus promise us?
- What does it mean to have 'hope' because of that?
- How should we live now?
- What does that look like for us?

Allow the conversation to flow and avoid trying to find simple 'right' answers; rather, talk about what this means for us right now. Encourage the children to be honest about some of the challenges this raises but remind them that we have a certain hope for the future, because of what Jesus has done for us.

As you draw to a close, pray for the children, for any specific challenges that have been discussed during this session, and thanking God for the hope he gives us.

BECKY MAY

is a freelance writer and experienced children's and youth leader. She can be found at theresourcescupboard.co.uk.



Every question is a doorway

This month, here are lots of useful questions for you to pick and choose from. There are a million different contexts in youth and children's work where you can make use of questions like these. Obviously in one-to-one mentoring sessions, but have you also considered group mentoring? For example, you might divide a group into pairs and get them to ask each other a few questions from a selection such as this. They will intuitively mentor each other!

You might also like to have a few good questions up your sleeve to ask at an opportune moment in the midst of sessions or gatherings, while other activities are going on at youth group, after church, during a kick about, or perhaps walking somewhere with your young people. You could pose a question in a message or text which allows the young people to consider their answer and take their time before replying (following your church's safeguarding policy, of course). Perhaps you could put one on your youth group Instagram feed and let people answer as they wish.

Enjoy and get creative with where, when, how (and why?) you ask poignant questions. Every question is a doorway!

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What would you like to do but can't yet?
 What was a silly thing you did?
 Who helps you when you feel sad?
 What have you done lately that you are proud of?
 Describe a time you felt bad for someone else.
 What would you most hate to lose?
 When were you last brave?
 When did you last cry?
 When did you last lie?
 When did you last feel tempted to lie but didn't?
 Do you ever take risks? What was the last one?
 What have you tried to say but no one listens?

How important is winning to you?
 When was the last time you felt rejected? How did you deal with it?
 Does anyone fight in your house? What is that like?
 What is your view on swearing?
 When did you last try something new?
 What rule at home makes no sense to you?
 Has anyone asked you to do something you didn't want to?
 What do you daydream about doing?
 What are you most afraid of?
 Who has disappointed you?
 What was something nasty someone said to you?
 What was something nice someone said to you?

FAITH QUESTIONS

What confuses you about the Bible?
 What different forms can worship take?
 What is the main way people should know we are Christians?
 When have you felt faith rise in you?
 What happens when we die?
 How would God describe you?

SENTENCES TO COMPLETE

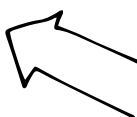
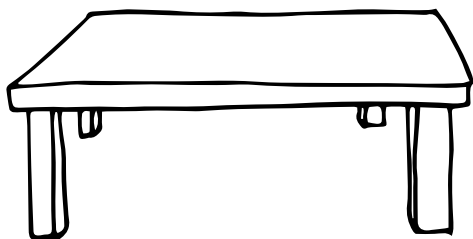
I make a good friend because I'm...
 I'm worried about...
 I wish I had more...
 If only I had...I'd be happier.
 ...really grinds my gears!
 My parents won't let me...
 ...is soooo boring!

JOEL TOOMBS

has an MA in Christian mentoring and wrote the *Mentoring and Young People Grove* booklet. He is a volunteer youth worker.

CARELESS IN THE CARE OF GOD

"IF YOU DECIDE FOR GOD, LIVING A LIFE OF GOD-WORSHIP, IT FOLLOWS THAT YOU DON'T FUSS ABOUT WHAT'S ON THE TABLE AT MEALTIMES OR WHETHER THE CLOTHES IN YOUR CLOSET ARE IN FASHION"
(Matthew 6:25, The Message)



What do you worry about?
Clothes? Food? Other things?
Draw these on this table.

"LOOK AT THE BIRDS, FREE AND UNFETTERED, NOT TIED DOWN TO A JOB DESCRIPTION, CARELESS IN THE CARE OF GOD, AND YOU COUNT FAR MORE TO HIM THAN BIRDS"
(Matthew 6:26, The Message)

Can you go outside and find some birds?
Can you hear them sing?
How could you be free like a bird, free of worry, free to know God's love?



Draw a bird here

"INSTEAD OF LOOKING AT THE FASHIONS, WALK OUT INTO THE FIELDS AND LOOK AT THE WILDFLOWERS. THEY NEVER PRIMP OR SHOP, BUT HAVE YOU EVER SEEN COLOUR AND DESIGN QUITE LIKE IT? IF GOD GIVES SUCH ATTENTION TO THE APPEARANCE OF WILDFLOWERS...DON'T YOU THINK HE'LL ATTEND TO YOU, TAKE PRIDE IN YOU, DO HIS BEST FOR YOU?"
(Matthew 6:29-30, The Message)



Find a flower and draw it here.
Ask God to help you trust him for all your needs.